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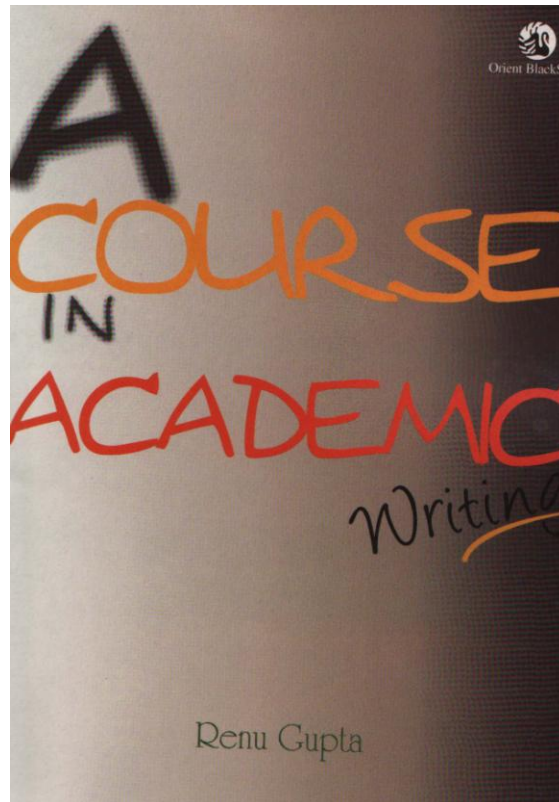
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A Review of *A Course in Academic Writing* by Professor Renu Gupta

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A Very Useful Book

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A Review of *A Course in Academic Writing* by Professor Renu Gupta

A Course in Academic Writing by Professor Renu Gupta (Orient Blackswan, New Delhi 110 002, 2010) is a boon to both students and teachers who are engaged in doing research. Our content and research methodology are part of our specific disciplines we specialize in. However, presenting our research with clarity to the reading public and academics is, indeed, a distinct skill that needs to be cultivated as a general skill.

Courses in academic writing or research writing are based on universal principles of presentation of research findings using appropriate language and idiom. Even the best researchers find it difficult to communicate their research in a manner that is easy to understand even as the reports retain their original methodology, intent and conclusions.

Professor Renu Gupta's articles are always well written for professional journals and her contribution to the field of teaching English to speakers of other languages has been superb and relevant to teachers, researchers and students in South Asia and in the developing world. In this book also, we get the benefit of her insights and experience.

Contents of This Manual

The book consists of 10 chapters with an introduction. The chapters of this book are as follows:

1. The Big Picture
 2. Approaches to Writing
 3. The Process of Writing
 4. Writing Paragraphs
 5. Types of Organization
 6. Text Genres
 7. Reports
 8. Research Paper
 9. Presenting Your Ideas
 10. Editing for Style or Beyond Grammar
- References

The Big Picture

The first chapter (The Big Picture) presents a good survey of what would be dealt with in the book. The big picture presented to us deals with two types of texts: in one text the main point of the text appears at the end and in the other it appears in the very beginning. These are not simply stylistic differences. Each of these has its own function, and we need to learn to use the most appropriate approach based on the content and goal before us.

Approaches to Writing

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The second chapter (Approaches to Writing) deals with approaches to writing. In essence, the author asserts that “an essay that resembles a stream of consciousness is no longer acceptable; you are expected to give thought and care to your essay and produce a polished product that is reader-friendly” (p. 18). Several techniques or strategies are suggested and described with clarity and examples. For example, chaining, hierarchical organization, throwing in all our thoughts, and so on. The author (creates and) presents an excellent example of an organized essay in this chapter.

From chapter 2, the book presents several insightful exercises for teachers, students and researchers. We highly commend that teachers also do these exercises before they enter class and teach any of the topics in academic writing or research writing. Let us not assume that because we have our Masters, double Masters, or even triple and quadruple Masters in various subjects, we have attained great skill in academic writing. Writing is a growing skill and it grows with adequate exercise almost on a daily basis. (“Whoever has ears, let them hear!”)

The Process of Writing

The third chapter (The Process of Writing) deals with gathering material for research, evaluating sources (a badly needed skill in our students in South Asia), copying information and its effects leading to plagiarism, steps in the writing process, outlining, taking notes, using quotes, paraphrasing, etc.

Ill-effects of Plagiarism

When you check a dictionary for the meaning of the word *plagiarism*, you will, indeed, be surprised that its original meaning is *kidnapping!*

Plagiarism is innocently indulged in by many because of their inability to paraphrase and summarize using appropriate language in their own words. There is also a cultural tradition that glorifies quotations from well known sources as demonstrating the scholarship of the writer of the article, and so on. There are also several literary and didactic traditions within South Asia that have encouraged use of the very same words of the great poets and scholars in the past as proof of scholarship and paying obeisance to such sages, et al. However, currently there are several researchers who knowingly indulge in plagiarism hoping that their mastery in copying would not be easily detected. Plagiarism is now more a moral and ethical issue, and an issue relating to intellectual property rights.

Professor Renu Gupta clearly tells all us about the ill-effects of plagiarism. Teachers, students and researchers would do well to heed her sound advice.

Writing Paragraphs

The fourth chapter (Writing Paragraphs) contains many useful suggestions and exercises. All paragraphs in our writing should be well connected. To the extent possible, all our paragraphs

may be short and focused on one major point each. Coherence is another major virtue. Professor Renu Gupta suggests the following:

1. One paragraph should contain only one idea.
2. The sentences should be arranged in some order.
3. There should be a topic sentence.
4. The supporting details should follow the topic sentence.
5. Irrelevant information should be deleted.
6. A concluding sentence can be added. (p. 40)

Each of these points is well stated with examples. Several steps in writing are presented. Good organization of this chapter is easily noticed. In fact, in our assessment all the chapters are well organized and offer in themselves as good and valid examples.

Types of Organization

The fifth chapter (Types of Organization) deals with aspects of ways to organize information. In essence, the following points are dealt with.

1. Problem/Solution
2. Examples
3. Enumeration
4. Sequence
5. Comparison and contrast
6. Cause and effect
7. Spatial order (p. 50)

This is an interesting, useful and elaborate chapter. This deals with, among other things, selection and presentation of visuals and preparation and presentation of graphs, etc. Visuals should become an integral part of our academic writing. Addition of visuals will enable us to present the concepts and issues under discussion in a simpler and easier manner that is easy to follow. However, it is the relevance that should guide us in the selection, preparation and presentation of visuals.

Text Genres

The chapter on text genres (Chapter 6) looks at the forms of texts and the role of language. The following are the focused points here:

1. Differences within a genre, based on audience and purpose
2. How information is presented
3. The language of reports and research articles
4. Formal versus informal language

Although this one is perhaps the shortest chapter in the book, teachers, students and researchers should read it several times and take the contents and suggestions seriously. If your language is not appropriate and if your form of communication is not relevant or appropriate, it is more likely that your writing will not attract many readers. Confusion will prevail. What we seek is simplicity and clarity, and some linguistic style features should help us here.

Reports

Chapter 7 is on Reports. After defining reports, Dr. Gupta presents types of reports and several samples of reports. This chapter needs better attention on the part of the students and researchers, because report writing is not just for academic classroom but we all will be called upon to write reports, short and long. Indian diplomats have been renowned all over the world for their skill in writing communiqués and various forms of reports. While each discipline may offer and demand specific features for their reports, there are several general features. These should become part of our training.

The Research Paper

Chapter 8 deals with the processes and constraints of writing a research paper. Research paper is the main medium through which advanced students and research scholars announce to the world their findings, concepts, arguments, etc. Unfortunately, this is the weakest link in their training, education and practice. Perhaps, most of us go directly into writing research papers without proper understanding of the structural composition of what constitutes a research paper.

One of the suggestions that Professor Renu Gupta makes is that the academic writer use a published article to understand the structural components. If researchers carefully and patiently review several articles in leading journals of their field they should easily arrive at some understanding. However, understanding and practice are two distinct items. They need to check with their seniors while they are in doubt. Humility and a willingness to learn from others are two important virtues here.

We need to learn at this stage what a style sheet means. There are several formatting devices or processes such as MLA, APA, IJDL or Indian Linguistics, to cite a few. Each structural element of a research paper must be mastered. This book *A Course in Academic Writing* is a great guide here.

Most papers written by scholars in the beginning of their career fail in their “references” section. First of all we must recognize that references are an integral part of our paper. More often than not, this section will reveal our seriousness of purpose.

Presenting Your Ideas

Presenting your ideas is the title of chapter 9, a precious chapter written with great insight and clarity. In this chapter the following major points are dealt with:

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1. Purpose of a presentation
2. Components of a presentation: The Speech, Question and Answer Session, Handouts, etc.

We notice some confusion in binding appropriate pages at the printer's level. Chapter 8 pages are presented again under chapter 9. Hopefully this error is already rectified before more copies reach the market.

Editing for Style or Beyond Grammar

Chapter 10 deals with style. We always tend to write circumlocutory in our essays. There is a lot of unconnected and unrelated content and sentences. Style simply means that we write as we compose our ideas in a straightforward manner. Aspects of plain English must be adopted and taught in our classroom. Old-fashioned words and compound and complex sentences must be eliminated. This is not easy, but we can certainly achieve this. This should begin with our speaking plain English. Forget about all those long terms!

Buy This Book and Use It Daily

Buy This Book and Use It Daily is our suggestion to our teacher and researcher colleagues. Professor Renu Gupta has done a great service by writing this book with elegant and yet simple and plain English.

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